

Sermon Text for Christmas Eve December 24, 2023

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 2:1-7 **“Jesus Christ is born”**

It feels like today has been a continuous victory celebration around here. We have spent a lot of time together from two services this morning to having three services together this evening. That is a total of 5 times that we had a chance to be together today for about 5 hours. That's a lot, but there is nothing more important that we do together as a church than gather for worship. Think about all the time that you spend here at the church for meetings or for getting things set up and decorated, or for anything else, there is nothing more important that we do together as a church than what we are doing now, which is worship of our living and loving God.

Scripture gives us a promise today, this evening, and it is a promise upon which we can rely for our present and our future and it can help us to decipher and translate the past that we have had, and put it within the appropriate context as we live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The sermon title for this evening seems like a pretty simple one, but the proclamation that Jesus Christ is born finds its equal in “He is risen! He is risen indeed!” Advent in the Gospels prepared us for this birth. Now we have arrived, we have arrived at his birth and it is a victory formation, it is a time in the life of the church where we can celebrate knowing that Jesus has come upon the earth, that the Word was made flesh and when that happened, Jesus was born and placed in a manger.

Both of our Scriptures this evening proclaim a victory – Isaiah promises one that will come in the future and Luke provides it in the present in his Scripture. Let's read Luke.

READ

If you watch any football at all you know that this year a lot of talk has been given on the types of formations that offenses use during the game. There is a new formation this year and it was perfected and is used by your very own Philadelphia Eagles and it is called the brotherly shove, or more commonly known as the tush push. What happens is that you have the front linemen gather together very closely, you have the quarterback who is ready to receive the ball, and then you have about three other very strong, heavy people who are ready to push the quarterback forward when he receives the ball. The rate of success for the Eagles is somewhere in the 90's. It works just about every time. It is a formation meant to gain a few yards and it is an aggressive, violent, burst of power that overwhelms the opposition so that they can do nothing but watch the ball move forward.

There is another formation that my team, the Dallas Cowboys, has perfected, it is called the victory formation. There really isn't much to it, at a certain point of the game you know that your team has won so you line up everyone at the line except for the quarterback who gets the ball and maybe one other person who is back there and the quarterback gets the ball and kneels down because the game is over, the victory has been proclaimed. It is called the victory formation because when you get in that formation you know that you have won, you know that you have the victory in hand.

Christmas Eve is the church's victory formation. This is what it looks like when we know that we have won, when we know that no matter what is happening in life no one can take away the victory that we have in Jesus in his birth and in the celebration that we are all a part of in this win.

But whom have we conquered, who is our enemy our opponent against whom we are fighting? Isaiah helps us with that for this evening as we try to understand why we are as a church in a victory formation. It is not against flesh and blood that we fight, no, that would be too easy. Isaiah tells us that we have the victory because there was a time, look at vs.2, when we were walking in darkness. There was a time when we did not know Jesus, when we didn't understand that the birth of our Savior, that when we made this proclamation that Jesus Christ is born, there was a time when it really didn't mean anything to us except for the joy that we saw in the faces of children.

But today, this evening, we know that we no longer have to walk in darkness because the light of the world has come. We see that in vs.2 and then again if you look at vs.4 where the rod of the oppressor has been broken, so we can exult in our victory. Now, if you the birth of Jesus is to you nothing more than a day of extra work with presents and visiting relatives, then my guess is that you are still in the tush push formation and not in the victory formation. Jesus Christ is born which means that our time together is a celebration that we have won the battle. You no longer have to strive after those things that you think are necessary because only Jesus can provide that which we need.

We also see that in Isaiah, look at vs.6 where he tells us that the reason we have the victory is because a child has been born to us, a son given. When we say that Jesus is born we say, as Isaiah did, that there will be endless peace in our lives and in the world when we make that proclamation. When we confess that we believe and want to live our lives as Jesus Christ then we are saying that we believe that Jesus will establish his rule on earth and when Jesus reigns then we will always have the victory. This is why we are in the victory formation right

now, this is what it looks like, with the joy and the beauty of a newborn king who has taken our lives and shaped them to His purposes.

If we are not experiencing the joy of Christmas then maybe, just maybe, we need to get out of the brotherly shove formation and come in line with the rest of us in this victory formation. I know you may not feel like it, but that is why it is called the victory formation because there is no need to push, no need to strive, no need to work in such a way to earn anything from the newborn king. He has given it to you, the victory, in Jesus.

As we make our way to Luke, we need to be reminded that the birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of this Isaiah Scripture. We know that where we come from matters, we come from this promise of Isaiah which states the victory is promised to us, and Luke tells us that the victory took place in Bethlehem on this day. Isaiah ends with the zeal of the Lord will do this. Which basically means that the zeal of God means that God loves us so much, that this birth of Jesus reflects how much God loves us.

When Luke speaks about the victory that we have in the proclamation that Jesus Christ is born he lays it out in a very historical way in order to ground this proclamation in history. It doesn't just come out of the whims and fancies of people who want it to take place, but rather it actually happens in the nitty gritty of history itself. He begins in chapter 2 for the first four verses in laying out this history. He tells us when it happened: during the reign of Emperor August, and while a census was taken by Quirinius who was governor of that region. It would be like 2000 years from now someone would find a document that described an event that took place when President Biden was in power and governor Shapiro was governor. We could say, 2000 years from now, yes, that really did happen so we know that this is an event that took place in history.

We know where the birth of Jesus took place and we read that also in these first four chapters and we know why it took place where it took place. It didn't take place in Nazareth where Joseph and Mary lived, because they had to move 85 miles, probably walk 85 miles while pregnant and probably in the last term, in order to get to Joseph's family's home town of Bethlehem. Joseph's relatives were from the line of David and Bethlehem was the town from where his family originated. That is where he had to register because of the law of that time.

When we say Jesus Christ is born we see how God maneuvers the actors of that day in order to provide a victory. Caesar August is more than a historical figure for Luke, he is an instrument of God's will in this one particular case. He was a tyrant, let's not get that twisted, but even in the midst of tyranny God is still at work. Luke implies that emperors, governments

and laws serve the purpose of God, often without even knowing it. Victory comes about by God using people in power and using the realities that the world offers.

Now, this morning we spoke about how Matthew portrays a wonderful and beautiful image of the miraculous mixed perfectly with the mundane, but not so for Luke. The divine seems to only provide victory through what is at hand. There is no mention in Luke in these verses about the divine conception. It might have been nice to be reminded of that in vs.5 where we read that they were engaged and she was pregnant. Matthew reminds us of that a few times when he gives us the birth narrative. But those reminders are left back in chapter 1 of Luke. Today, for the birth of Jesus, it is just that, the simple facts of the birth. Victory happens in everyday life.

Luke has kept the story clear of any decorations that would remove it from the lowly, the poor, the marginal of the earth. Jesus is born, he wrapped like every Palestinian baby would have been wrapped in cloths to keep him straight, and since they were probably sleeping outside on the earth, to raise him up from the ground he was put in a manger. Nothing miraculous in the birth of Jesus according to Luke in these verses.

It is in the mundane where God provides the victory. There doesn't need to be a miracle for God to conquer. Brothers and sisters the birth of Jesus gives us the victory this evening. When we wake up tomorrow that victory remains, there is no other game that needs to be played. Jesus won once and for all and for all eternity. We can remain in victory formation. Amen.